


# **The Harriman Institute Forum**

**Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov**

***PERESTROIKA SUICIDE:  
NOT BY *BRED* ALONE***

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## ***Perestroika Suicide: Not By Bred Alone*<sup>1</sup>**

**Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov**

Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature. Later he sold the product for five pounds.

—Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-63)

In this citation from *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx tries by his very punctuation to keep cultural production separate from the marketplace. One hundred years later, his Soviet misinterpreters were still doggedly maintaining that separation. One hundred and thirty years later, Marx's organicist notion of creative work reads like a utopian tract from an ancient—that is to say, pre-Marxist—civilization. It makes more sense that Milton, the poet, might write these lines about Marx than that Marx, the debunked political economist of Communism, could write these lines about Milton.

To reduce *perestroika* (1985-90) to its *economic* manifestations—that is, to its failures—is, of course, to conflate its eventual consequences with the many-sided historical process itself, including its cultural successes. At the same time, to lament the (inaccurate) redefinition of *perestroika* in predomi-

nately economic terms—cooperatives, joint ventures, privatization, and so forth—is to deflect attention from something more important, namely, the ways in which culture has been transformed by those same economic considerations. This reality can, in fact, best be acknowledged by those (each for different reasons) who either specifically are *not* in culture or specifically *are* in economics. Thus, it is not that *perestroika* came to be concerned with economics rather than with culture, but rather that culture, passing through the historical period of *perestroika*, came at last, for better or worse, to be defined and restricted by economic realities.

### **Decanonization**

It is an oft-repeated joke among Soviet citizens and Sovietologists that many countries have an unpredictable future, but only the Soviet Union has an unpredictable past. The disappearances of Trotsky under Stalin, of Stalin under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and of Khrushchev under Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko are a set of cultural enact-

<sup>1</sup> The title's pun refers both to Vladimir Dudintsev's Thaw-era novel *Not by Bread Alone* (1956) and to the oft-characterized *brat* (raving, delirium) of the *perestroika* era. The economic stability—and abundance of bread—during Khrushchev's Thaw period empowered the intelligentsia to assert in the name of the people that "man does not live by bread alone," but also (implicitly) by spiritual and cultural sustenance. The economic instability—and scarcity *even* of bread—during Gorbachev's *perestroika* period has reduced the newly won cultural freedom celebrated by the intelligentsia to a kind of *brat* in the eyes of many discouraged citizens.



ments that prefigure the political *matryoshki* of the *perestroika* period. *Perestroika's* transformation of the traditional *matryoshki*—Russian stacking dolls that consist of identical but diminishing wooden figurines representing maidens in native costume—into governmental *patryoshki* marks an inevitable and natural evolution, a harmless and parodic (note this unusual combination) diminishment of a traumatic historical past.

This compulsion to render the past unpredictable, to “undocument” Soviet reality—airbrushed photographs, warehoused statues, buried monuments, re-cut films, re-edited manuscripts—was most articulately expressed in the errata slip-sheet to the 1954 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, advising its readers to use scissors or a razor blade to remove “Beria” and insert an expanded entry on “Bering Sea.” This slipsheet, a kind of ode to Conceptualism before its time, was supplied to all encyclopedia subscribers.

What has intrigued Western observers about this decanonization process is not the fact of decanonization itself (for, after all, the West, too, has its fashions, its market demands, its internal mechanisms for change). More striking has been the insistent official denial that an earlier text ever existed and that, as a result, very little can afford to be New—one of the most valuable words in capital’s advertising vocabulary—since to be New is to expose historical disjuncture.

Accordingly, in the 60 years between Lenin and Gorbachev, to cease to be holy has not meant to become profane, or even to be forgotten and disappear. Instead, it has meant the erasure of existence, except within a morally precarious netherworld known only to a small segment of the urban intelligentsia and described only by unofficial oral discourse (a conversation, an unpublished interview, a moment of improvisation in a theater performance) rather than by recorded texts (literature, television, film, radio). Unofficial culture, therefore, whether we are speaking of Beria or Sakharov, became sounds that could perhaps be uttered aloud, but did not figure in the orthography of official culture.

One result of this activity of undocumenting the past has been the emergence of a very different readership than in the West, one that is aware of the perishability of a given reading; of its fragility in the face of the state; of its vulnerability at any moment to displacement by political circumstances to another status or another reading; of being replaced at

any moment not by another fashion, another superstar, another masterpiece, but by the Bering Sea.

The liberal-democrat *perestroishchik*, whose inchoate cry calls for full larders and revered poets (a combination unobserved in any known civilization), has come to understand the historical necessity of changing geographical names back to their “original”—that is, pre-revolutionary—appellations: Karl Marx Street to Staraya Basmannaya, Kalinin to Tver, Brezhnev to Naberezhnye Chyolny. He would equally advocate returning Gorky to its famous marketplace name, Nizhny Novgorod, seeing in this act a settling of accounts with Soviet power, if only because of its treatment of Sakharov. The erasure of the literary reference in this instance is a small price to pay; indeed, the fact that culture with a capital “C” spells “totalitarianism” is most evident in the case of Gorky, whether we are speaking of literature or geography. But then it turns out that Tchaikovsky Street belongs to the same ideological and municipal superstructure. That is to say, if Karl Marx Street must revert to Staraya Basmannaya, then it is not surprising that Tchaikovsky must revert to Novinsky Bulvar.

*Perestroika* voluntaristically freed culture from its servitude as handmaiden to politics, whether culture desired to be freed or not. As a result of this liberation, culture can no longer aspire to its former enslavement, a condition that had been as necessary for the maintenance of totalitarianism as culture’s disposability (perhaps recyclability is a more appropriate metaphor for the 1990s) is for the management of capital abroad. This is not to suggest that high culture will cease to exist in the Soviet Union. The astonished visitor to Bayreuth’s Wagner Festspiel—with its crying towels, its oval promenade, and its exhibition of the opera audience in photographs displayed in the town’s shop windows—or Britain’s Glyndebourne—with its formal dress on public transport and its picnic hampers of potted shrimp and champagne—can attest that capital has preserved its own oases, where the tenets of its belief system are acted out and its sacred reliquiae are displayed.

It is rather to suggest that post-*perestroika* culture will involve considerable displacement for the urban intelligentsia, who have had relatively easy and inexpensive access to a small arena of high culture. This displacement is radically different from previous historical displacements described earlier; it is no longer “Beria,” the encyclopedia entry, that is displaced, but rather the encyclopedia subscribers themselves. The errata slipsheets of today recom-

mends that the text remain, but the reader be changed. In moving towards a market economy, of which it has been taught to disapprove for 70 years and according to whose postulates it has not historically excelled, the Soviet cultural establishment confronts the fact that previous representations of the merchant—the intransigent and insular Old Believer, the alien Western capitalist, the misguided and naive financier of the October Revolution, the lovable and vulgar NEPman, the local Moscow *raketir*, the rapacious Tagi-Zade<sup>2</sup>—profoundly problematize culture's role in emerging market conditions, where culture has gained its political freedom while losing both its audience and its economic security.

## Dismantling Personality Cults

As much as the six years of the Gorbachev administration have been imprinted with the personalities of the leading political contenders—Yegor Ligachev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev, Boris Yeltsin, and, of course, Gorbachev himself—the period from 1985 to 1991 has been as marked by the dismantling of a number of personality cults. While the term “personality cult” traditionally refers to the cult surrounding Stalin, in its broader application the term denotes the entire form of political organization centered on the male figure worshipped for his immanent good (or bad) qualities. Stalin is thus neither the only nor the first such cult figure, as has been convincingly demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Since the attempted assassination of Lenin by Fanya Kaplan on 30 August 1918, official politics has promulgated a clear, if historically contradictory, hagiography (or demonology) of its cult figures, of which the most notable besides

Stalin have been Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and the General Secretary reigning at the moment.

Within the field of political culture, as it has been constituted for six decades, two of these cult figures—Lenin and the reigning General Secretary—have been uniformly positive. Two—Trotsky and Bukharin—have been uniformly negative. Stalin, a significant deity precisely because of his capacity for transfiguration, has been subject to enormous fluctuation in response to immediate official needs—compare, for example, the Stalin of 1945-53; the Stalin of 1956; the Stalin of the 1970s; and the Stalin of 1987, to cite four major metamorphoses.

During Gorbachev's tenure as General Secretary and President of the Soviet Union, each of these political cults underwent severe destabilization. Stalin, the most unstable figure and therefore the most responsive to policy change, has become simultaneously the historical norm and the most extreme deviation in the development of socialist society (a contradiction that requires no resolution); the mummified Lenin has gradually begun to be humanized (if not yet interred);<sup>4</sup> Bukharin and, more cautiously, Trotsky have been selectively rehabilitated; and even Gorbachev became the subject of political cartoons in the Soviet press.<sup>5</sup>

## Dismantling Creator Cults

While the political culture has been undergoing these changes, the field of *cultural politics* during this same period (1985-91) has been marked by its own consistent, if not entirely deliberate and anticipated, dismantling of “creator cults,” both official and unofficial. The cult of the great Artist precedes the advent of Soviet power by some 37 years; the institutional roots of this practice can be traced back at

2 Ismail Tagi-Zade, sporting white suits and Stetsons, has emerged as the most flamboyant of the new robber-barons in the Soviet Union. During the Stagnation Era, he was a mid-level functionary in Goskino (the State Committee on Cinematography). Since the onset of *perestroika* he has become a hard-currency multi-millionaire (by selling stallions to the West) and a soft-currency multi-billionaire (by receiving commissions on all flower sales in Soviet cities). His current project is an attempt to establish a monopoly over film distribution and screenings throughout the USSR.

3 For an examination of the formation and development of the cult of Lenin, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). For a discussion of the flip side of cult creation, see Richard Stites, “Iconoclastic Currents in the Russian Revolution: Destroying and Preserving the Past” in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, edited by Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 1-24.

4 Theater director Mark Zakharov's call for Lenin's body to be removed from the mausoleum and given a decent burial ignores the fact that a “decent burial” for the ruling class has indeed customarily been precisely in a crypt—that Glyndebourne of cemetery life—rather than in the earth. Lenin's embalmers were merely fulfilling the appropriate rites normally accorded to the leader of the ruling ideology, be he a Romanov, a Roosevelt, a Rockefeller, or a RSDLP comrade.

5 See Serge Schmemmann's sampling of Soviet cartoons directed at Gorbachev in the *New York Times*, 5 May 1991. By far the most significant among the cartoons is the caricature of Gorbachev that appeared in the officious *Krokodil*. However uncritical Gorbachev's representation—as attentive tailor, assiduously stitching together a torn Soviet Union—his very presence on the pages of *Krokodil* implies the possibility of his future appearance in a more negative image. Thus his negative representation in the so-called independent press is, while more critical, less significant than his mere appearance on the pages of *Krokodil*. For a discussion of the continuing hypersensitivity surrounding the new “cult of the President,” see Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov, “*Makulakul'tura*: Reprocessing Culture,” *October* 57 (1991): 95-96.

least to the celebration surrounding the unveiling of the monument to Aleksandr Pushkin in 1880.<sup>6</sup> Soviet cultural administrators, however, did not restrict themselves merely to perpetuating the cult of Pushkin. Instead, the very principle of "creator cults" became the operative model for propagandizing and defending the accomplishments of the single, reified Artist within cultural production.

The "creator cult," complete with its own particular hagiography, martyrology, or soteriology, formed the basis for both official and oppositional cultural histories of the Soviet Union: Vladimir Mayakovsky and Sergey Yesenin in official histories of poetry, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam in oppositional histories; Yuri Olesha and Mikhail Sholokhov in official histories of prose, Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Nabokov in oppositional histories; the Vasilyev "brothers" and Sergey Gerasimov in official histories of cinema, Sergey Paradzhanov and Andrey Tarkovsky in oppositional ones. While the iconostasis of official culture was perhaps more rigidly constructed and maintained than that of unofficial culture, the *chin* (rank) of official culture and the *ryad* (row) of unofficial culture were nevertheless implicitly present.

Two "creator cults" in particular have dominated Soviet culture since the mid-1970s: the cult of the exiled prose writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and that of the deceased guitar-poet Vladimir Vysotsky. Though Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky lacked any significant aesthetic or cultural intersections, as cultural phenomena they shared two qualities: first, an appeal that ran counter to clear-cut and established divisions between the city and the country, the educated and uneducated, and, most important, the politically empowered and the politically disenfranchised. Second, they shared a similar political trajectory: a brief period of official tolerance fol-

lowed by a prolonged period of official disapproval.<sup>7</sup> Unofficially, of course, the works of both producers circulated throughout Soviet society in ever increasing amounts: Solzhenitsyn's books in *samizdat* and later in *tamizdat* (foreign-based publishing, smuggled back in), Vysotsky's guitar-poems on *magnitizdat* (unofficial tape-recording). It is not surprising, therefore, that all histories of contemporary culture in the Soviet Union for the past two decades have been overdetermined by the personalities and reputations of these two figures. They have been the determining absence in official histories and the determining presence in oppositional ones.

Between 1986 and 1991 virtually the entire output of both cultural producers was made available through official outlets to cultural consumers in the Soviet Union. The Disputes Commission (Union of Cinematographers-Goskino) negotiated the release of all the "shelved films" starring Vysotsky or featuring his songs; several collections of his guitar-poems and prose works were published; Melodiya released two double albums of his most popular songs and began to issue a multi-record set, "Vladimir Vysotsky in Concert."<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, almost all of Solzhenitsyn's prose was published in the Soviet Union in 1989-90. While several journals began to serialize individual parts of his four-volume fictionalized history of World War I, *Red Wheel*, Solzhenitsyn's major books (*First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, *Collected Stories and Articles*, and the three volumes of *Gulag Archipelago*) were printed by a number of official publishing houses. All of these books are easily available at most of the bookstands and kiosks for 25 to 35 rubles a volume.<sup>9</sup> Even Solzhenitsyn's most recent essay, "How Shall We Restructure Russia?," containing his prophetic vision and prescription for the breakup of the Soviet

6 See Marcus C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). The intersection between "cults of personality" and "creator cults"—that is, between political culture and cultural politics—is at the center of Yuri Mamin's film *Sideburns* (*Bakenbardy*, 1990). In one of the film's most breathtaking sequences—from the point of view of Soviet and émigré audiences—a sculptor converts his bust of Lenin into a bust of Pushkin with a minimum of effort.

7 In the case of Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky, official tolerance extended to the very top of the political hierarchy: Khrushchev personally interceded to ensure the publication of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" (*Novy mir* 12, 1962); Brezhnev was an avid listener of Vysotsky's guitar-poems, of which his reported favorite was "Koni privredlivye."

8 While earlier publications of Vysotsky's guitar-poems have disappeared from the marketplace (*Nerv* [Moscow: Sovremennik, 1982]; *Chetyre chetverti puti* [Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1988]; *Ya konechno vernus'* [Moscow: Kniga, 1988]; and several others), the most recent two-volume collection of guitar poems and prose continues to be readily available for 40 rubles at most of the unofficial (that is, high markup) bookstands and kiosks throughout Moscow. The two double albums—"Synov'ya ukhodyat v boi" (1986) and "Okhota na volkov" (1990)—and the 18 concert albums that have been released so far are stocked in all official record stores in Moscow and sell for 2.50 to 3.50 rubles an album.

9 The first parts of *Krasnoye koleso* appeared in 1990: *Avugust chetyrnadtsatogo* in *Zvezda* (1-12, 1990), *Oktyabr' shestnadtsatogo* in *Nash sovremennik* (1-12, 1990), and the first part of *Mart semnadtsatogo* in *Neva* (1-6, 1990). The second part of *Mart semnadtsatogo* is scheduled to appear in *Neva* in 1991, the fourth part in *Zvezda*, and *April' semnadtsatogo* in *Novy mir*. *Novy mir* also serialized *V krughe pervom* (1-5, 1990) and *Rakovy korpus* (6-8, 1990). As the editorial to this last work indicates, the journal had already "accepted the work in the autumn of 1967 but was unable to publish it then for reasons that had nothing to do with the journal" (6, 1990: 4). For a valuable summary of Soviet reactions to the publication of *Gulag*, see John B. Dunlop, "Reactions in the USSR to Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*," *Report on the USSR* (9 March 1990): 3-5.

empire and the resurrection of a purified Russian state, was published immediately in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, despite the accompanying media fanfare, both of these events were greeted with a deafening silence by cultural consumers.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in the peculiar logic of the Soviet cultural economy—where the availability of a cultural commodity for open and public purchase is invariably a sign of its increasing social irrelevance, and where relevant cultural commodities (books, tickets to the theater or concerts, etc.) are “obtainable” not “purchasable” (*dostat'* versus *kupit'*)—the works of Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky are in danger of disappearing into the paper pulping plants, following in the footsteps of other socially irrelevant authors, such as Brezhnev and Chernenko.

The growing irrelevance even of Solzhenitsyn as a living rebuke to Soviet society is most painfully acknowledged by émigré critic Aleksandr Genis:

Even Solzhenitsyn, who for many years has been made to speak out by forces both here [in the West] and there [in the USSR], has turned out to be “not up to snuff.” His composition was received in the spirit it deserved—a run-of-the-mill literary opus by a classic writer. The Solzhenitsyn “feasibility study” is a plan for some other country, like business advice for the reconstruction of Byzantium. An entertaining endeavor, but not much use to Istanbul, which never again will become Constantinople.<sup>12</sup>

Moscow critic Natalya Ivanova looks back at this living monument with similar ambivalence: “On the day the Solzhenitsyn Readings were held in the Writers’ Union, the whole country was in shock after [Prime Minister] Ryzhkov’s announcement about price restrictions for non-Moscow residents. That day in Moscow was not Solzhenitsyn Day, but the first day of passport-fixing.”<sup>13</sup>

Solzhenitsyn, it must be remembered, has gone through nearly as many transmogrifications in his 30 years in the public arena as has Stalin in his 70 years. The Solzhenitsyn of 1962–64, whose candidacy for the Lenin Prize was furiously debated in

writers’ meetings and on the pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestiya* and *Literaturnaya gazeta*;<sup>14</sup> the Solzhenitsyn of 1974, whose *Gulag Archipelago* had just appeared in the West; the Solzhenitsyn of 1987, whose presence was the major challenge to *perestroika*; the Solzhenitsyn of 1989, whose textual return to the Soviet Union raised the apparition of his imminent physical return—all these must now reckon with the Solzhenitsyn of 1991, whose lengthy works have sorely tested the limits of *Novy mir* in a radically different (and less inspiring) way than 30 years earlier under Khrushchev.

Solzhenitsyn, a chronicler of apocryphal texts admitted into church scripture just as the church itself disbands, has proven too prolific for current Soviet publishing norms. He can no longer expect to be exempt from existing norms, as he was with respect to US publishing norms in the 1970s and 1980s. The violation of those US economic—that is, market-driven—norms was permitted, in part, due to his corresponding success in violating Soviet political norms. Thus the interdependence of *perestroika* and Western capital (business ventures, educational exchanges, joint data-base projects, cultural events) was long prefigured by the interdependence of the Stagnation period and Western capital (news media and publishing, weapons systems analyses, not to mention an entire micro-industry of Sovietology). With the demise of communism as a “real, existing” economic and political system (as distinct from an ideology), we shall probably never again in our lifetimes see such license of length given to a Soviet writer published in the United States. Put differently, nowadays no political reasons are compelling enough to warrant such a violation of market norms.

In the Soviet Union, both the political and cultural oppositions, echoing the totalitarian strains of official politics and culture, have until recently been unable to make sense of a Solzhenitsyn hopelessly out of touch with the political realities of the three Russias (Great, Small, and White). Nor have they been any more astute in recognizing that Sakharov,

10 See *Komsomol'skaya pravda* and *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 18 September 1990.

11 In its 3 October 1990 edition—that is, two weeks after Solzhenitsyn’s essay appeared on its pages—*Literaturnaya gazeta* ran a full page of material (three articles and a collective letter from Kazakhstan) responding to the essay. The editors prefaced the articles by expressing their “certainty that readers’ letters to *Lg* will contain an enormous number of responses to Solzhenitsyn’s work” and promised to make “available space on [its] pages [to publish] the most interesting ones.” This two-week delay and the subsequent failure to publish unsolicited readers’ responses strongly suggests that few were received. Instead, *Literaturnaya gazeta* began to run an irregular column entitled “God Solzhenitsyna,” in which the paper prints solicited answers by established literary critics to three questions posed by the editors.

12 “Posle perestroiki,” *Panorama* 525 (3–10 May 1991): 16.

13 “Mezhdru kazarmoi i rynkom,” *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 27 June 1990.

14 *Pravda*, 30 January 1964; *Izvestiya*, 15 January 1964; *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 8 February 1964; see also Vladimir Lakshin, *Novy mir vo vremena Khrushcheva: dnevnik i poputnoye* (1953–64) (Moscow: Knizhnaya palata, 1991).

for all his stature as a symbol of moral intransigence, was often inarticulate, indecisive, and, yes, contradictory. To notice was potentially to engage in the dismantling of the cult. These hagiographic "slippages," therefore, were of necessity explained by subordinating them into those "unfathomable" species that were Stalin or Sakharov, Lenin or Solzhenitsyn. The old ritual dance between the totems of political culture and cultural politics (Khrushchev and Solzhenitsyn, Brezhnev and Vysotsky) has been rendered archaic without any judgment as to good and evil, victory or defeat.

Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky, however, are not exceptions in the process of dismantling creator cults;<sup>15</sup> it would be more accurate to see their current status within Soviet society as representative of all such cults. Their books lie side by side on the bookstands and in the kiosks with collections by Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak, and Nabokov. And there is as little consumer demand for them. While collections of works by these sacred cows of Russian literature were still obtainable during the summer of 1990 only through personal contacts (that is, for list price under the counter at state stores) or by purchase on the black market (for 10-15 "*nominaly*"—that is, for 10 to 15 times the list price), then by the summer of 1991 they were available at most of the bookstands and kiosks for a markup of only 5-7 *nominaly*.

This dramatic drop in demand—and price—has been accompanied by an equally dramatic change in the venue for the books' distribution, now that the major black market for books, located in Moscow on Kuznetsky Most and operating on weekends, has virtually disappeared. Or more accurately, the *centralized* black market has disappeared; the current gray market consists precisely of these very same bookstands and kiosks, located on just about every street and open every day.

The decentralization of Kuznetsky Most is merely a geographic manifestation of the decapitalization of culture. Two other kinds of decentralization are also evident within the bookselling industry: first, the fragmentation of genres, a topic

to which we shall return later; second, the growing distinction between the expanded range of "urban survival manuals"—karate, sexual dysfunction, business financing, herbal remedies, video digests, horoscopes, computer programming, carpentry, dream charts, and American management—and the more lucrative aspect of the black market, namely erotica. By this term, of course, we also mean pornography, since, unless the latter is confused with the former in the Soviet Union, it has no opportunity to be sold legally at all. The relegation of erotica to special "erogenous zones," appropriately distanced from "establishments of public education, culture, or collective rest," is to be determined, regulated, and licensed by the district (*raionny*) administration, while fines for the violation of established ordinances will be levied by the Moscow City Council.<sup>16</sup> Thus the decapitalization of culture is simultaneously an aesthetic, economic, and juridical process: as the state retreats from the practice of shooting its poets and turns instead to levying fines for unzoned erotica, it simultaneously turns its attention away from high culture to low.

A further indication that the "creator cults" are disintegrating in the absence of consumer interest is the present state of annually scheduled "Readings" (*chteniya*). If even two years ago it was impossible to obtain an admittance ticket to any of the unadvertised but standing-room-only scholarly conferences devoted to one of the sacred cows (the Akhmatova Readings, the Mandelstam Readings, the Nabokov Readings) without expending a considerable amount of time and personal pull, then already last year these conferences began to take place in halls that were less than half full.<sup>17</sup> In effect, the process of dismantling creator cults is merely one aspect of a larger—and infinitely more significant—social process that is occurring in the Soviet Union: the wholesale devaluation of all received culture.

15 Even the two most recent "creator cults" have already fallen apart: the countercultural cult surrounding Viktor Tsoy, lead singer of the rock group Kino and star of Rashid Nugmanov's film *The Needle* (1988), seems to have died with him in an automobile accident on 15 August 1990; and the high-cultural cult of deceased filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky, organized by the very same cultural administrators who persecuted and denounced him during his lifetime, found only brief support from the viewing public, filmmakers, and the new generation of cultural administrators.

16 *Moskovskiy novosti*, 26 May 1991.

17 The *Nabokovskiy chteniya* held in 1990 at the Gorky Institute for World Literature were very sparsely attended, even though the first such conference—held in the same hall in 1989—was jammed to capacity. A later conference, the *Bulgakovskiy chteniya*, occurred on 13-14 May 1991 and the hall at the Gorky Institute was two-thirds empty.

## De-Fetishizing Cultural Production

The fate of creator cults cannot be separated from two other developments in the devaluation process: the de-fetishizing of cultural production and the de-elitising of cultural consumption. Until recently, four specific periods of twentieth-century Russo-Soviet culture have dominated the official and unofficial marketplaces: the literature and philosophy of the Silver Age; the literature and literary politics of the 1920s; the essays and fiction of the Thaw; and the "other literature," émigré literature, and counterculture of post-1975.<sup>18</sup> In the contemporary cultural marketplace, each of these periods is passing through a kind of cultural bankruptcy.

In addition to issuing large print runs of collections of Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Nabokov, and Pasternak, Soviet publishing houses—state-run, joint ventures, and cooperatives—have published large printings of most of the writers of the Silver Age: Nikolay Gumilyov's and Mikhail Kuzmin's poetry, Andrey Bely's memoirs, philosophical essays by Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Vasily Rozanov, etc. While this fact has been frequently celebrated in literary newspapers and journals, cultural consumers have remained indifferent. If only two years ago any of these books—even in massive print runs of several hundred thousand copies and price markups of a thousand per cent or more—would have been snapped up by consumers on the existing marketplace, then today these same books—even in modest print runs of 20,000 copies—continue to be available almost everywhere at a minimal markup for state-published books or at list price for joint-venture and cooperative books.

In similar fashion, the essays and fiction of the Thaw—most of them not republished during the Stagnation period and their absence lamented for two decades—have failed to find a new audience in

the contemporary cultural marketplace. Indeed, the three volumes issued so far of a four-volume critical anthology of all the essential texts of the Thaw continue to lie in huge piles in all of the bookstores.<sup>19</sup> Publishing houses have already given up on the literature of the Thaw as a cultural commodity: none of the major novels of the period, including Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not By Bread Alone* (1956), have been reissued in substantial print runs, and plans to publish a second issue of the Thaw anthology *Pages from Tarusa* have been postponed.<sup>20</sup> As writer and critic Viktor Yerofeyev has remarked, despite the earnest liberalism of the Thaw writers, the contemporary Soviet reading public is put off by their "hypermoralizing, the disease of maximal moral pressure on the reader."<sup>21</sup>

By comparison with the literature of the Thaw, the literature and literary politics of the 1920s provided Soviet journals and publishing houses with a substantial market between 1987 and 1989. The (re)publication of works by "suppressed authors," such as Isaak Babel, Boris Pilnyak, Andrey Platonov, Yevgeny Zamyatin, during these years may, in fact, have been the "last hurrah" of elitist culture in the Soviet Union. For already by 1990, works by the writers of the 1920s and critical studies of the cultural politics of the period began to take up space on the bookstands and in the bookstores respectively.<sup>22</sup> Even enrollment in university seminars devoted to the literature and cultural politics of the 1920s has dropped dramatically since this period lost its aura of official disapproval.<sup>23</sup> In the contemporary cultural marketplace, the pluralism (actual or imagined) of the 1920s has proven to be as irrelevant a cultural commodity as the hegemony (actual or imagined) associated with the imposition of socialist realism in 1934.

Finally, this same pattern of cultural bankruptcy can be discerned in the fourth period that has dominated the cultural marketplace in the Soviet Union:

18 The term "other literature"—*drugaya literatura*—was introduced by the critic Sergey Chuprinin in his essay "Predvestiye. Zametki o zhurnal'noy proze 1988 goda," *Znamya* 1 (1989): 210-24. According to Chuprinin, this "other literature" differs from mainstream literature (in which "social-civil and frequently ideological notes are clearly expressed") by its completely "other problematic, moral accentuation, and artistic language" (p. 222). This term, including as it does works by Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Tatyana Tolstaya, Venedikt Yerofeyev and Viktor Yerofeyev, Valeriya Narbikova, and Yevgeny Popov, does not refer to a formally integrated body of writing. Instead, Chuprinin's definition points to the uniformly unpublishable status of this writing, given the literary politics of the Stagnation period, and finds the reasons for this in the oppositional socio-aesthetic (rather than explicitly political) criteria present in each work.

19 *Ottepel'* 1953-1956. *Stranitsy russkoy sovetskoy literatury* (Moscow: Moskovskiy rabochiy, 1989); *Ottepel'* 1957-1959 (1990); *Ottepel'* 1960-1962 (1990). All have been compiled by Chuprinin, who has also written the concluding "Khronika vazhneyshikh sobytiy" for each volume.

20 See Condee and Padunov, "Makulakul'tura," pp. 91-92.

21 Viktor Yerofeyev, "Pominki po sovetskoy literature," *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 4 July 1990.

22 Galina Belaya, whose earlier anthologies of literary criticism from the 1920s and studies of the cultural politics of the period were snapped up by avid readers before they reached the bookstores, most recently published an excellent examination of the 1920s Marxist literary association *Pereval—Don Kikhot 20-kh godov* (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1989). This study, too, is still available in most Moscow bookstores.

23 See the interview with Belaya, "Zatonuvshaya Atlantida" in *Zatonuvshaya Atlantida* (Moscow: Biblioteka "Ogonyok" 14: 1991): 11-12.

"other literature," émigré literature, and counterculture. Nabokov's novels, together with works by M. Ageyev, Vasily Aksyonov, Joseph Brodsky, Sasha Sokolov, Vladimir Voinovich, and Aleksandr Zinovyev are sold at many of the kiosks and bookstands throughout Moscow.<sup>24</sup> Though somewhat more difficult to locate, works by members of the "other literature" and the counterculture—Metametaphorists, Conceptualists, New Leningrad Wave, etc.—are also available in a variety of almanacs, new journals, and separate book editions.<sup>25</sup>

What is striking to the observer is not what is available, but rather those publications that have been postponed or even (possibly) canceled. Foremost among these are a number of publications that in 1990 became the most important forums for new writing by representatives of the "other literature" and the counterculture: the second issues of the almanacs *Vest'* (*News*, rescheduled for July 1991 by its Danish-Soviet publisher) and *Zerkala* (*Mirrors*, indefinitely postponed by Vsya Moskva); the cancellation (at least temporarily) of the almanac *Gondvana* by Vsya Moskva; and the failure of the Yugoslav-Soviet publisher Interbuk to issue the titles it advertised in early 1990 for two of its series, "The Silver Age" and "Contemporary Soviet Poetry and Prose."<sup>26</sup>

While it is possible that some of these publications have been delayed or canceled due to the acute and genuine shortage of paper that has affected the entire publishing industry in the Soviet Union,<sup>27</sup> it is also incontestable that the market for printed material has been oversaturated and that prices—official and gray market—are falling precisely at the time when the cost of paper has shot up. The laws of the emerging marketplace are having a devastating impact on Soviet publishing:

while it is now certain that the cost of paper will continue to increase, there is no longer any certainty that the print run for any publication will be sold out overnight (or even half of it sold out in a month). Publishers' overheads, as well as the need to carry the financial burden of a backlist—truly revolutionary developments in the world of Soviet publishing—are ineluctably changing the entire profile and structure of the Soviet publishing industry, official as well as joint venture and cooperative.

There is yet another indication that the "other literature" and counterculture have lost their mass appeal among cultural consumers. In the late 1980s readings of prose and poetry—even solo readings—by representatives of these two groups were guaranteed a standing-room-only audience, despite the absence of any advertising or the fact that they took place in non-literary establishments (the House of Medical Workers, the House of Architects, etc.). Yet by 1991, when two advertised evenings of avant-garde poetry were held in the prestigious Oval Hall of the Library of International Literature and featured virtually every major poet of the Soviet counterculture, attendance at each of the readings was fewer than 50 people.<sup>28</sup>

The dismantling of creator cults and the defetishizing of cultural production in the Soviet Union are already forcing a radical reorganization of priorities within the culture industry. Yet these two aspects of the contemporary cultural process are dialectically intertwined and interdetermined by a third aspect: the de-elitising of cultural consumption. While it is highly probable that the Soviet populace continues to be one of the most literate reading publics in the world, it should already be clear that *what* that populace is reading has changed significantly in the last few years.

24 Ageyev, *Roman s kokainom* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990); Aksyonov, *Ostrov Krym* (Moscow: Ogonyok—Variant [British-Soviet publisher], 1990) and *Ozhog* (Moscow: Ogonyok—Variant, 1990); Brodsky, *Nazidaniye* (Leningrad: Smart [Finnish-Soviet publisher], 1990), *Oseniy krak yastreba* (Leningrad: IMA Press, 1990), and *Stikhotvoreniya* (Tallinn: Aleksandra—Eesti Raamat, 1991); Sokolov, *Mezdu sobakoi i volkom* and *Shkola dlya durakov* (Moskva: Ogonyok—Variant, 1990); Voinovich, *Moskva 2042* (Moscow: Vsya Moskva [German-Soviet publisher], 1990); Zinovyev, *Ziyayushchiye vysoty*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Pik, 1990).

25 Among the new almanacs that carry selections from the "other literature," émigré literature, and counterculture are *Konets veka* (Moscow, 1991); *Solo* (the first issue was published in Moscow under the sponsorship of the Union of Theater Workers, 1990; the second by Book Chamber International [British-Soviet publisher], 1991); a collection from various issues of the unofficial journal *Tret'ya modernizatsiya* (Leningrad: Assotsiatsiya "Novaya literatura," 1991); *Vestnik novoy literatury* (Leningrad: Assotsiatsiya "Novaya literatura," 1990, 1991). New journals that carry many of the same contributors include *Evropa + Amerika* and *Strannik*.

26 Interbuk has published only one title in the latter series, Venedikt Yerofeyev's *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow, 1990). Among the books the company advertised but has not published in the series are new collections by Oleg Chukhontsev, Viktor Yerofeyev, Sergey Kaledin, Pyotr Mamonov, Petrushevskaya, Dmitry Prigov, and Tolstaya. Similarly, Vsya Moskva has published only two of the books it advertised in 1990—Viktor Yerofeyev's *Russkaya krasavitsa* (Moscow, 1990) and Vyacheslav Pyetskikh's *Rommat* (Moscow, 1990).

27 See Scott R. Righetti, "The Soviet Paper Chase: Newsprint Crisis Imperils Glasnost," *Research Memorandum*, Office of Research, United States Information Agency, 29 April 1991.

28 The readings were the second part of a German-Soviet Festival of Avant-Garde Poetry (*Tut i tam/Hier und dort*), sponsored in Moscow by the Goethe House on 20-21 May 1991. Among the Soviet poets included in the program were Kholin, Viktor Krivulin, Andrey Monastyrsky, Vs. Nekrasov, Prigov, and Lev Rubinshtein. The first part of the festival was held in Essen on 8-10 December 1989; see *Tut i tam. Hier und dort. Russische und deutschsprachige Poesie* (Essen: Thalia-Druck, 1990).

## De-Elitising of Cultural Consumption

The removal of authoritarian controls over the publishing industry, the elimination of massive subsidies to the state-run publishing houses, the imposition of cost-accountability and self-financing principles, and the (at least occasional) encouragement extended to new publishing enterprises, have transferred unprecedented economic power to cultural consumers. This, in turn, has precipitated an almost frantic pursuit of new consumers by the entire culture industry.<sup>29</sup> In publishing, this pursuit has manifested itself in the emergence of four new "literary" modes that now collectively dominate the marketplace of the printed word: detective fiction, instructional material for nascent businessmen, manuals for the physical and psychic arts, and the entire range of erotica.

During the early years of *glasnost* and *perestroika* it was not difficult to predict that detective fiction would rapidly expand its share of the market once the obstacles inherited from the Stagnation era were removed. Even under Brezhnev, the state publishing houses printed a steady (though by no means sufficient) supply of highly selective translations of detective stories and novels, usually issued in a generic series ("Foreign Detective Stories") and with generic titles: *American Detective Stories*, *Japanese Detective Stories*, *Italian Detective Stories*, etc. At the same time, these publishers also released a number of Russian-language novels in related fields—procedurals (notably, by Arkady and Georgy Vayner) and espionage novels (Yulian Semyonov)—since the socio-economic structure of socialist society precluded the existence of (or the need for) private and capitalistic detectives.

What was impossible to foresee in those early years was the extent of the flood that would be unleashed on Soviet society once the obstacles were removed. Between the summers of 1990 and 1991—that is, at the height of the publishing crisis caused by the paper shortage—many hundreds of detective titles were printed and thrown onto the market for prices that ranged from one to fifteen

rubles. Dozens of novels by James Hadley Chase (seemingly the most popular author among Soviet readers at this time) and Agatha Christie have appeared, as well as representative samplings of novels by Raymond Chandler, Ian Fleming, Frederick Forsyth, Dick Francis, Robert Ludlum, Ross Macdonald, and Georges Simenon. Because most of these publications consistently violate the international copyright laws (unauthorized translations, the absence of royalties, etc.), a single novel can appear under different titles and in multiple translations. And there is no indication that this particular market has begun to be oversaturated. Indeed, many of the fledgling cooperative and joint-venture publishers successfully continue to finance and expand their soft-currency operations on the profitable craze for detective fiction.

With the exception of the procedural/espionage novels by established Soviet authors published under Semyonov's imprint,<sup>30</sup> the most striking feature of this detective flood is the absence so far of a new generation of Russian-language writers. The domestic contribution to the detective fiction currently available for sale in Moscow is framed by its "otherness": on the one extreme is the reprint of Roman Antropov's (Roman Dobry) pre-Soviet "chapbooks" on the cases of Ivan Putilin;<sup>31</sup> on the other is the publication of émigré writers', Fridrikh Neznansky and Eduard Topol's detective novel, *Brezhnev's Journalist, or Deadly Games*.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, despite the undisputed profitability of detective fiction, Soviet publishers seem to be reluctant to risk marketing Russian-written material, preferring (at best) to include these aberrations among a collection of putative translations.<sup>33</sup>

Publishing has clearly lost its former professional identity as the purveyor of Enlightenment; its new identity is defined as "business" pure and simple. Equally clearly, this change in identity is not limited to the publishing industry. Despite the government's erratic policies concerning the transition to a market economy, substantial sectors of the public sphere of production—and the entire private sphere—are already operating within the capitalist system ruled by cost, overhead, and profit margins. It should therefore come as no surprise that hand-

29 See Condee and Padunov, "Makulakul'tura," p. 86.

30 Semyonov established one of the first joint-venture (French-Soviet) publishing houses (DEM) in Moscow in 1988. Not surprisingly, the first novel published was Semyonov's *Reporter* (1988).

31 See the ten "chapbooks" in the series *Genii russkogo syyska I. D. Putilina. Rasskazy o ego pokhazhdeniyakh* (Moscow: Sirin [German-Russian], 1990-91).

32 Moscow: Sirin, 1990. The novel was initially published by Posev-Verlag (Frankfurt) in 1981 and an English translation, *Deadly Games* (no translator listed, London and New York, Quartet Books) appeared in 1990.

33 See, for example, *Po sledu zmei* (Moscow: Vsyia Moskva, 1990).

books describing Western (in particular, American) business structures, procedures, and strategies are beginning to emerge as a kind of detective fiction for serious readers. While many of these publications are translated from other languages,<sup>34</sup> almost as many are written in Russian by Soviets who (allegedly) have had some experience of Western business.<sup>35</sup>

If the undisputed best-seller of 1990 and 1991 continues to be Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), which has appeared in a number of different editions, then its "theoretical" primacy is now being challenged by several "practical" autobiographies by American industrial tycoons (Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* [1922]) and corporate CEOs (Lee Iacocca's *Iacocca, An Autobiography* [1984]). The most recent competitor in the business-book trade is Ludwig Erhard's *Wohlstand für alle* (1956; *Prosperity Through Competition*, 1958), the cornerstone text of the so-called "German economic miracle" of postwar industrial redevelopment.<sup>36</sup> Cultural *perestroika* has become an integral—if not entirely official—part of the attempts to implement economic *perestroika*.

The third category of new publications in the Soviet Union consists of works that extend through the entire range of physical and psychic arts: from "how-to" brochures on self-defense<sup>37</sup> to "do-it-yourself" pamphlets on folk cures and holistic medicine, from encyclopedias of sexuality and childbirth<sup>38</sup> to manuals on developing extrasensory abilities and "confessions" by the leading psychics, from gastronomy to astrology.<sup>39</sup> Considering that both the material body and the non-material psyche were equally forbidden pleasure zones for half a

century in Soviet culture, it was only to be expected that they would be joyously repossessed once the cultural landscape—and the anatomical one—was more accurately charted.

The resurgence of various cultural forms of mysticism and spiritualism also belongs to this category of new publications. The rejection by the populace of the entire legacy of materialist philosophy (in particular, Marxism-Leninism) has led to the proliferation of books by idealist, existential, and religious writers.<sup>40</sup> From this point of view, most striking to a bystander is the absence in the marketplace of books published by the presses of the Russian Orthodox Church. All of the Bibles and New Testaments for sale in the kiosks and at the bookstands have been printed either by cooperative or joint-venture publishers, or have been imported. Even the books by twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologians, which are in high demand and available only with difficulty on the open market, are issued by state-run publishing houses.<sup>41</sup> By refusing—even symbolically—to enter the marketplace of the printed word, the Church has ceded its spiritual role to the power of the flesh.

## Erotica As Guerilla Commodity

In this regard, the publication in early 1990 of Villi Konn's *Adventures of a Cosmic Prostitute*<sup>42</sup> either offended or amused most customers at the kiosks where it appeared for sale. Despite the suggestive title and cover, the story can only marginally be considered a work of erotic literature. The erotic element consists of three (brief and generic) descriptions of a naked woman-cockroach and two

34 See, for example, the translation of C. Jackson Grayson, Jr. and Carla O'Dell, *American Business: A Two-Minute Warning* (New York: The Free Press, 1988)—*Amerikanskiy menedzhment na poroge XXI veka*, trans. I. S. Oleynik and S. P. Semetsov (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1991).

35 See, among others, P. S. Zav'yalov and V. E. Demidov, *Formula uspekha: marketing* (Moscow, 1988); S. Zhiznin and V. Krupnov, *Kak stat' biznesmenom* (Minsk: Predprinimatel', 1990).

36 *Blagosostoyaniye dlya vsekh* (no translator listed, Moscow: Nachala Press, 1991).

37 See, for example, *80 sposobov kak ne stat' zhertvoy prestupleniya: karate, dzhudzhitsu, kungfu, kembo* (no indication of author, place, or date of publication; printed by Penzenskaya pravda).

38 Dr. Christiane Verdoux, et. al., *Entsiklopediya seksual'noy zhizni. Fiziologiya i psikhologiya*, trans. T. Bol'shakova (Moscow: Dom, 1990).

39 This last pairing contains the most curious contradiction: both gastronomy and astrology in the Soviet Union are frozen in time. The overwhelming majority of cookbooks that have entered the marketplace are republications of standard works of a time long past—late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. All contain ingredients that several generations of Soviet citizens have never seen. Similarly, the astrological charts and dream guides—*Million snov*, 1901 (offset reprint, Moscow: Kniga—Printshop [Canadian-Soviet publisher], 1990)—are organized as historical invariants: the birth sign or dream vision is never subject to time or context. In a peculiar twist to Gertrude Stein, a Virgin is a Virgin is a Virgin.

40 See especially the "literary-artistic, historico-cultural" almanac *Laterna Magica* (Moscow: Prometei, 1990), which contains examples of all of these types of writing.

41 See Father Pavel Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdeniye istiny* (2 vols.) and *U vodorazdelov mysli* (Moscow: Pravda, 1990).

42 *Pokhozheniya kosmicheskoy prostitutki* (Moscow: Vsyia Moskva, 1990). While everyone in the Moscow book trade recognized that "Villi Konn" was a pseudonym—the obviously foreign name signalling to readers that the work was a translation of some salaciously decadent Western erotica—the identity of Konn was a closely guarded secret even in the editorial offices of Vsyia Moskva. It is now rumored that Konn is a collective pseudonym for a group of Tass employees (*Knizhnoye obazreniye*, 17 May 1991). This would place *Pokhozheniya...* into the same tradition as Penelope Ashe's (a collective pseudonym for *Newsday* reporters) *Naked Came the Stranger* (1969); see Mike McGrady, *Stranger than Naked*; or *How to Write Dirty Books for Fun and Profit* (New York: P.H. Wyden, 1970).

references to the sounds of a condom being removed. Instead, the story is a kind of borshch of forbidden pulp fiction: chunks of science fiction, slices of the hard-boiled detective, bits of the thriller, and just a hint of sex. Even this hint, however, was enough to distinguish *Adventures of a Cosmic Prostitute* from the other first-generation attempts to break the taboo on the printing of sexually explicit material. Most of the other "scandalous" works of this generation (for example, reprints of Mariya Yevgenyeva's *Lovers of Catherine the Great* or S. Gorsky's *Wives of Ivan the Terrible*<sup>43</sup>) were simply fictionalized and highly sanitized stories of the sexual appetites of in/famous rulers.

By late 1990, the second generation of erotic literature had appeared in the Soviet Union. The works of this generation have no precedent in the history of Russian-language literature, not even the "notorious" poetry of Ivan Barkov or the folk stories collected in *Russia's Secret Fairy Tales* (*Russkie zavetnye skazki*). Even their titles make it clear that these new books are the soulmates of the best tradition of American drugstore or "XXX-shop" porno-novels: *The Devil's "SEX" Cards*, *California Vacation*, *The Bachelor*, *Passion Hotel*, *Adventures in Moonlight Hotel*, *Gender Comings*, *Swedish Threesome*, *Memoirs of a Young Woman*.<sup>44</sup> These novels are equally fearless in their graphic catalogings of close encounters of every kind (oral sex, anal sex, multiple orifice sex, multiple partner sex, homosexual sex, and even missionary sex) and in their allergic avoidance of every narrative convention associated with "realism" (authorship, characterization, description, development, temporality, causality, consistency). More interesting, however, is their fearlessness concerning their status as cultural commodities.

These novels are essentially guerilla commodities. Social indignation and pressure from conservative cultural workers forced these novels out of the kiosks and onto the streets,<sup>45</sup> where they have been unable to find a haven even on the outdoor bookstands in the city. Instead, these books are now sold in many of the underground passageways and metro entrances, where they are spread out on a piece of cloth laid on the ground. This enables the

sellers to gather them into a bundle and move away at the first appearance of either the militia or offended citizens, who constitute a kind of volunteer morality police.

But these books are guerilla commodities not merely in terms of their distribution and marketing; they are also guerilla commodities in their reproduction and packaging. Since none of the central presses dare to print them, most of these books are simply "printed" on the typewriter—a revenge on the elite cultural *samizdat* of bygone years—reduced, photocopied, and stapled. While it appears that publishers of erotic literature have at least some access to printing presses in the Baltic republics, where many of these books originate, once in Moscow they, too, are reproduced on photocopying machines. As a result, the market for erotic literature does not distinguish between the fetishized category of "original" (complete with color-printed cover) and the degraded category of "copy" (black-and-white reproduction with poor resolution); both objects—even when sold side by side—have the same price (4 rubles for a 16-page story, 15-20 rubles for a 50-80 page novel). Even these prices, however, actually mock all other cultural commodities. While all other publications in the Soviet Union—state, cooperative, or joint-venture—carry a printed "list price" (honored or not), these guerilla commodities joyously unmask the gap between list price and asking price. Printed on all of them are the words "price negotiable" (*"tsena po dogovornosti"*).

Until the government allows it to come out of the gutter and take its place on the street, erotic literature will continue to be a guerilla commodity and its "look" will continue to be colorless. Recent developments indicate that certain steps are already being taken to legitimize the status of erotic literature. The first issue of the "independent almanac" *Konets veka* (*End of the Century*, 1991) carries an announcement on its back cover that the editors have signed an agreement with émigré writer Edward Limonov to publish his sexually explicit autobiographical novel, *It's Me, Eddie!* In April 1991 the first glossy, color, fully-illustrated "Russian maga-

43 *Lyubovniki Ekateriny* (Moscow: Volya, n.d.); *Zheny Ioanna Groznago* (Moscow: Delo, 1912; rpt., Moscow: Dinamik-nauka, 1990).

44 As a rule, these publications carry a minimum of bibliographic information, frequently dispensing with the pretense of indicating a fictive author. The following information can be provided for the titles listed: *D'yavol'skie "SEX" karty* (Latvia), *Rodovoye okonchaniye* (Sergey Khalyi; Tallinn, *Eshche-seriya*), *Shvedskaya troyka* (O. Konner; Moscow: Eroticheskaya literatura, 1991), *Vospominaniya molodoy zhenshchiny* (Riga, New-Sex Hit).

45 In December 1990, yielding to pressure from cultural conservatives, Gorbachev ordered the creation of an anti-pornography commission. The commission, chaired by USSR Minister of Culture Nikolay Gubenko, was charged with studying the struggle against pornography and suggesting steps to preserve public morals (*Report on the USSR* [14 December 1990]: 34).

zine for men"—*Andrey*—appeared in many Moscow kiosks; the issue costs just under 10 rubles and is anatomically incorrect only in the immediate vicinity of the female genitalia.<sup>46</sup> Finally, as we mentioned earlier, in May 1991 the Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council voted "to follow the example of civilized countries" by tolerating adult-material shops in designated areas of most neighborhoods. After 14 June 1991, violators of this zoning ordinance will no longer face criminal prosecution, a procedure requiring substantial capital expenditure by municipal authorities. Instead, violators will be subject to fines, thereby deflecting a portion of profits from the sale of erotica back into the municipal budget.<sup>47</sup>

The success of *perestroika* (1985-90) as the Communist Party's final five-year plan, lay in the fact that its failure could be publicly discussed at the moment of its occurrence. The internal contradictions of *perestroika*, which eventually brought about its demise, were evident from the very outset: its standardbearers were unrealistic yet passionately committed to the truth; idealistic yet obsessed with objectivity; totalitarian in their liberationist philosophy; enraptured with their own Radiant Future, when they would finally emerge victorious from dismantling the disconfirmed Radiant Future of their predecessors.

*Perestroika* began when those living in the present could no longer afford the price of the old rosy future; like apostate Ivan Karamazovs, they tried to return their tickets of admission. The rosy future of communism proved to be not only too expensive but also unappealing as its hostage-consumers contemplated alternative futures, whether they were "affordable" (a word gaining rapid currency) or not.

*Perestroika* ended when the strict triangular model of social organization, weakened first by the revocation of Article 6, then further by the ongoing negotiations concerning the reconfiguration of the Union itself, ceased to be the single, dominant structure for effecting (or preventing) change. *Perestroika* was not in this sense a turning away from totalitarianism; it was totalitarianism's turning away from itself toward an eastern network of confederated republics, mirroring in some respects the confederative process of its West European neighbors.

Thus, the word "sovereignty"—that is to say, the right to use the word "sovereign," whatever meaning can be negotiated for that word at a particular historical moment—becomes an issue just at the time when the Union is recognizing that sovereignty is less vital to its international survival than a convertible ruble; and that the cost of that convertible ruble is the reduction of sovereignty from an internationalist to an interrepublicanist concept.

In the course of this transformation, clearly defined oppositions that stabilized the old, rigid, triangular structure have become destabilized: communism/democracy, Party/non-Party, hard currency/soft currency, freedom/tyranny, ours/theirs (*nash/ne nash*), West Berlin/East Berlin, open stores/closed stores, official culture/unofficial culture, and so forth. This reified thesis-antithesis relationship, presided over by a paralyzed Marxist state during the Stagnation period, could not resolve itself in synthesis. It required a total redefinition of relations between mutually exclusive categories, canceling out previous categories of opposition. Competing categories of discourse—"developed socialism" versus "stagnation," for example—turned out to be non-oppositional categories as it became possible to say publicly that the economic and social devastation running throughout all aspects of Soviet society was both developed socialism *and* stagnation, however much the confirmed socialist may have wished it otherwise.

## The Postmodernization of Soviet Culture

...the sign of the failing penis is the emblematic mark of postmodern subjectivity.

—Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *The Hysterical Male*

Nowhere is this redefinition of binary oppositions more clearly emplotted than in the postmodernist novella *No Return* by Aleksandr Kabakov, first published in *Iskusstvo kino* (*Art of Cinema*) in June 1989. The chief protagonist, who shuttles between two realized oxymorons—an obsolete present (1988) and a contemporary future (1993)—is accompanied by a woman from Katerinoslav,

<sup>46</sup> *Andrey* (Moscow, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> See *Moskovskiy novosti*, 26 May 1991. This decision is fairly similar to the recommendation made by Gubenko one week after he was appointed chairman of the state anti-pornography commission (*Report on the USSR* [21 December 1990]: 36).

which is simultaneously the ancient name and the newly restored name for Dnepropetrovsk. Thus, the woman's past is situated in a town for which the newest name is the most ancient name, while the postrevolutionary name is the old name. In forcing the reader to cope with three intertwining planes of time—the ancient city, the Soviet city, and the post-*perestroika* namesake of antiquity—Kabakov, a self-confessed postmodernist, shatters not only the clear opposition of “Russian Katerinoslav/Soviet Dnepropetrovsk,” but also the “unquestionable” opposition of space and time: the name of the space (Dnepropetrovsk) inescapably becomes an expression of time.

But this blurring of distinctions between space and time is not simply a literary device of postmodernism, or rather, the cultural experience of postmodernism does not restrict itself either to this device or to this text. Since 1934, literature in particular and then, by extension, the arts in a broader sense were required to observe the teleological aesthetics called Socialist Realism. Abram Terts's analysis, despite its sectarian conclusion, remains as accurate as ever: art was called upon to serve the Purpose, as indeed was history and most other forms of social activity.

Of course, both art and history, crippled in many ways, were nevertheless allowed, even required, certain avant-garde excesses in the service of the Purpose, as long as they did not engage in any such nonsense as the accurate documentation of reality. Multiple endings for multiple readerships (the self, the censor, and the “actual” reader); Aesopian multivalence; blank pages; conflicting narrative lines; a deliberately distorted mirroring of dates, places, and characters; a love of citation (mostly Lenin, come to think of it); the surrealistic interpenetration of Beria and Bering Strait; and, in general, a distinctly sutured quality—all of these were constitutive features of a kind of Stalinist Modernism, despite the official, and brutally enforced, opposition to Modernism.

As *perestroika* returned to history its modest entitlement (namely, the officially sanctioned right to emplot social reality according to a broader spectrum of methodologies), it likewise returned to art its entitlement (namely, its officially sanctioned right to participate without covert action in the ongoing discussion about a non-teleological aesthetics)—the “mitosis,” if you will, of modernism to postmodernism.

Komar and Melamid, Ilya Kabakov, Dmitry Prigov, Lev Rubinshtein, and other Conceptualists

are in this respect not so much alternative or parallel cultural figures as they are renegade Socialist Realists, runners in the relay race of history who, grabbing hold of the baton, break into a frenzied cancan. They have been the mediating moment between Socialist Realism as an imposed teleology and postmodernism as one cultural enactment of its demise. Their deliberate celebration of falseness, their presentation of image as image, their merciless reduction of culture, their invocation of sacred texts not as a foundation for authority but for the dechurching of those texts and all other texts, including their own—these traits signal the moment of transition to an aesthetics of postmodernism as one (and only one) of the artistic alternatives to contemporary culture.

One of the earliest moments in this transition to postmodernist culture was the so-called Bulldozer Exhibit of 15 September 1974 in Belyaev Park, where the KGB used both bulldozers and street-cleaning machines to destroy an open-air exhibit of contemporary art. It is worth noting from a distance of nearly two decades that the keepers of tradition in this affair were the artists, content to display their work in customary fashion. Their opposite number, in contrast, staged an innovative event: not so much a Bulldozer Exhibit as a Bulldozer Happening, a KGB Conceptualist performance piece, a successful, if somewhat forced, handing over of the baton.

In the almost 20 years since the mandatory baptism of the Bulldozer Happening, complete with uniforms and street-cleaning machines, an entire generation's terminology, stretching from the “Iron Curtain” across the entire “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” has ceased to serve as a set of geographical coordinates and stands instead for historical ones: “there was a time when we used the term ‘Iron Curtain’....”

This “postmodernization” of Soviet culture, most evident in the incapacity of older canonical texts, official or oppositional, to provide an authoritative foundation on which to build an argument, a belief system, or any other coherent cultural code, does not allow contemporary Soviet culture to “gain momentum,” in Habermas's sense, on the bones of received knowledge.

Poised above this socio-aesthetic extravaganza is Mikhail Gorbachev, the quintessential postmodernist hero-in-crisis: with his party in ruins and his country in crisis, he is the presiding General Secretary at the historical moment when that very cult is being dismantled; the only political cult figure after Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and Stalin who must live

through both his own dethroning and the dismantling of the throne. This *fin-de-millennium* hysterical male can no longer aspire to being the superfluous hero, the positive hero, the tragic hero, or the anti-hero. He is the non-hero.

This role is most clearly evident in the popular representation of the leader painted on the *matryoshki* at Izmaylovo. As the gentle, bovine *devitsy* (maidens) of the past have been replaced by older, male political leaders, often (though not exclusively) the discarded cult figures of a previous era, the *patryoshki* are not represented as analogues of the placid maidens, but precisely as men under stress: screaming monsters with bared teeth, menacing tyrants, military dictators brandishing tanks. Within this range, Gorbachev may be represented as a deranged rock musician with shattered glasses; as a jilted lover, plucking off daisy petals labeled with the republics of a disintegrating Union; as a decapitated head on a dictator's platter.

Nor does he fare any better in the urban *chastushki*, or rhymed couplets:

The virgins are moaning; the women all cry.  
We just don't know what to do, when, or why.  
Michael G. knew then just how to begin,  
Why can't he get it a bit further in?

Thus does Gorbachev, the lover who fails at love, embody the realized oxymoron characteristic of the postmodern period. The central figure of Soviet decentering and decentralization, the non-heroic hero of *perestroika*, Gorbachev fails but stays on; his failure is marked not by the implication that the hero resides elsewhere, but by the bankruptcy of heroism in its pure, morally unambiguous, and totalitarian incarnation.<sup>48</sup>

The profound changes taking place in the last years of twentieth-century Russian culture recapitulate in many respects those that occurred three centuries earlier, when such works as "Savva Grudtsyn," "Frol Skobeyev," "Shemyakin's Judgment," and "Story of Grief and Misfortune" laid the foundations of Russian letters: the abandonment of a collective social fate for an individualized, even self-willed fate; the emerging importance of money as theme, cause, and deterrent; moral ambiguity

replacing strongly delineated ethical categories of discourse; subversive laughter permitted publicly on the pages of culture; a reveling in the erotic; the lowering of literary forms; a perverse delight in the admixtures of language; the notion that individual wits, resourcefulness, and enterprise can affect one's condition.

These similarities do not suggest that Russian culture has moved backwards, though it may suggest that Russia, like the West, is experiencing the end of culture as it has been conceived for three centuries. Regardless of this larger issue, it is indisputable that Russia is reimagining itself as it awakens from the last, rosy dream of *perestroika*. In so doing, it is also reimagining the West, "civilized society," as we are now astonishingly called. This "civilized society," residing somewhere beyond Soviet borders, is marked by the economic status of the US and the high cultural traditions of white colonial Europe. It is not yet relevant to the waking dreamer of *perestroika* that "real, existing capitalism," either in the United States or in postcolonial Europe, looks and acts out of keeping with this apparition. The current stage in our cultural relations is the debunking of that apparition. A society with full larders and revered poets is not only impossible; it is the worst of both worlds.

June 1991

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<sup>48</sup> Among the *patryoshki* that have appeared since the putsch of 19-21 August 1991 is a set that represents Yeltsin as the outermost—the largest—doll, enveloping a diminished Gorbachev. The populist impulse expressed in this new ordering of dolls further underscores the post-*perestroika* ambiguity of Gorbachev as a head-of-state who simultaneously outranks Yeltsin and is subordinate to him.

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